Central Intelligence Agency
Washington, D.C. 20505

DCI/DDCI Executive Staff

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NOTE FOR: DCI

SUBJECT: Leaks and the Media

I hesitate to add to the large amount of material you already have, but some time ago I mentioned to [redacted] that you were giving a speech on the subject in the near future. [redacted] you remember, is the fellow who did the paper comparing journalism and espionage. He sent up the attached suggestions on points that might be made. I don't think they will be terribly helpful in general, but a few have some merit.

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Attachment

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5 June 1986

THE PROBLEM OF LEAKS

Background Information on Journalism and Espionage

Introduction

Investigative reporters and intelligence officers operate in basically similar ways. This is a logical result of having a similar objective of obtaining information that is not normally available to the public.

The primary difference affecting their collection methods is the lack of any stigma attached to journalistic inquiry, compared to the moral and legal inhibitions against spying. Reporters have legitimate, sometimes even praiseworthy, reasons for wide-ranging questioning. This gives them a mantle of respectability that spies lack.

This paper discusses the working methods of American reporters and foreign intelligence officers. It also compares their work with that of intelligence analysts.

In conclusion, it discusses the greater opportunities available to investigative reporters than to intelligence officers and some of the

difficulties involved in trying to restrict them. The paper also suggests approaches to trying to protect information.

Similarities and Differences

Investigative reporters and intelligence officers both cultivate persons who can provide information which they cannot obtain from generally open and readily available sources. They hope to find persons so well-informed and helpful that one alone can supply enough material for a complete news story or can fulfill an intelligence requirement. They are, however, prepared to accumulate bits of information from various sources until a complete picture emerges. They often benefit from the fact that each source does not realize how his information might fit into that picture, and therefore does not appreciate the significance of providing it.

Reporters and intelligence officers are also similar to intelligence analysts. All three must sift through large amounts of information in order to get what is pertinent to their needs: a media story, a response to an intelligence requirement, or an analysis of a complicated problem.

An intelligence officer perhaps has to show little personal initiative in deciding what is pertinent to an intelligence requirement that has been shaped by the needs of an analyst who formulated questions, while one of the basic qualifications for being an investigative reporter is a great deal of initiative to develop a story. Although both spy and reporter are constantly on the alert for unexpected information of value, the former

probably has clearer orders on what he is supposed to collect than a reporter at the beginning of a complex investigative story. But the type of evaluation that is required can be the same.

There are also differences between reporters, intelligence officers and analysts. Journalists rely almost entirely upon oral communication for their information. They ask questions of those who they believe will know the answers. There is no stigma attached to their asking, even if those who are asked refuse to answer. Foreign intelligence officers have to be more circumspect. They seldom can directly approach those in the best position to provide information. Nor can they often use one source as a springboard for identifying and trying to get information out of another one, as journalists can play one source against another. Intelligence officers have to seek indirect methods. One such method is to put greater reliance on searching through written material than reporters usually do. Analysts rely primarily on written material.

Reporters usually dig up all their material themselves. They rarely have anyone whom they can task to seek out information that they want. Analysts sit at the center of a network for collecting information, and they are able to request answers to questions that seem pertinent to them. Spies- [redacted] -who receive these requests in the form of intelligence requirements fall somewhere between the two. They try to develop their own collection networks of people who will pass them the kind of information needed to fulfill requirements, but they face many obstacles. STAT

Source Motivations

Before going into detail about the way each group works, it is necessary to examine the motivations of those who provide information to investigative reporters and intelligence officers. Understanding motives helps to understand how both groups are able to prosper.

Ranked in order of their pertinence to reporters, to both reporters and intelligence officers, and to intelligence officers--not in order of their importance in leading to leaks--the main motives seem to be:

-- Trying to influence policy-making in the executive branch. This applies less to intelligence leaks about past activities than to administration debates over future policy. Intelligence material is often used as part of the information made public an an effort to support or scuttle a policy initiative--for example, on capabilities to verify arms control agreements.

-- Trying to influence Congress or the public. As a subset of trying to influence policy, some leaks are aimed at garnering support on Capitol Hill or from public opinion--or to block support for someone else. Some officials take it upon themselves individually or as an institutional action to downgrade classified material for use in public debate. An Air Force general who retired in the early 1980s had as one of his primary duties the cultivation of the technical press with controlled leaks that would support Air Force budget requests to Congress in two ways: convincing

congressional members and staffs of the need for and workability of new weapons systems, and building a broader public constituency for those systems. That general's successor probably has the same job.

-- Letting the public know. While the constitutional argument is a weak one for reporters to use, it should not be ignored.

-- Helping a friend. Sources are far more inclined to talk with someone they know, and whose discretion they trust, than they are with an unknown journalist. Once the talking starts, the line between classified and unclassified information can easily become blurred in the source's mind, resulting in a reporter's getting more than he would through official channels.

-- Being patriotic. Although misplaced or incorrect, a feeling that the country's best interests are being served can be a motive for disclosing classified material. This amounts to the source's feeling that his own judgment about what is good for the country is better than the judgment of those who apply classifications to the material being disclosed. While patriotism should lead to an American reporter as the beneficiary of the leak, it can be construed as a reason for passing information to a foreign power in order to deter the United States from doing something that the source thinks is wrong.

-- Feeling important. A desire for recognition, even though limited by the necessity of hiding their actions, apparently motivates

many people to leak information. The egotism involved in becoming a valuable source could overlap other motives but often is sufficient in itself. In most cases, this primarily benefits reporters, but it can also be useful to intelligence officers--who are probably better trained in trying to exploit this motive.

-- Finding excitement. Some sources apparently enjoy the thrill of dealing in secrets. Providing leaks is a way of livening up what might otherwise be a humdrum bureaucratic existence. But, while leaking information to a journalist can provide thrills, they might be tempered by expectation of some constitutional protection. However, the thrill could be intensified by dealing with a foreign government in what is clearly an illegal activity.

-- Getting revenge. Persons who are aggrieved over policy decisions or personal treatment are ripe for exploitation by either reporters or intelligence officers--with the degree of ripeness directly related to the level of anger.

-- Earning money. With possibly rare exceptions, journalists do not pay for classified information. This motive benefits intelligence agents, as in the Pelton and Walker cases. The disaffected government employe who phones The New York Times knows he will not get paid; the one who phones the Soviet Embassy usually hopes to have his financial problems solved.

Some of these motives that seem to benefit reporters the most might be turned to intelligence officers' advantage by the use of "false flag" approaches. However, most sources of sensitive information are probably more likely to talk with an American reporter than with a foreigner, even a West European journalist. And a Soviet correspondent does not have the advantages of other reporters because he is correctly seen as a surrogate for a KGB man if not actually an intelligence officer himself.

There is one further consideration that is related to motivation. That is a tendency for people who have left sensitive government jobs to talk more freely about classified material than those still at work. Investigative reporters work former government people as major sources.

The tendency to talk more freely is not limited to the obviously aggrieved persons who have been fired or retired against their wishes, and who might be seeking revenge. It is also true of some who have been appointed to policy positions for a few years. It is perhaps most pronounced among those who have retired naturally from government careers and feel relatively free to reminisce.

A number of past leaks have originated with retired persons. In some cases, they might be trying to perpetuate their importance. In others, they might see past events as now being history and therefore no longer so much in need of classification protection. Besides, those who served in organizations that use polygraph tests no longer have to be apprehensive of them when they talk to reporters.

The importance of retired people goes beyond their specific information on classified matters to their sometime willingness to identify their successors who are currently holding sensitive jobs. This is of considerable significance because learning whom to target can be one of the toughest problems in journalistic investigation of some particularly closely held subjects.

Investigative Reporting

An investigative reporter sometimes pursues a story on the basis of his or his editor's idea of what would be interesting or important, sometimes because of information serendipitously acquired that needs further elaboration, sometimes as a result of a tip volunteered by a source--for one of the source motivations discussed above. Stories are rarely dumped fully developed on a reporter, as were the Pentagon papers, for instance, or some of the officially authorized leaks that an administration has given to major newspapers for policy reasons. Those that are dumped full-blown are probably not the ones that have caused the most security damage. The stories that reveal sensitive security material usually are the result of a lot of digging, of talking to many sources, of playing one source's information off against another's. This is especially true because most such stories are protected by security classifications.

For the kinds of stories that are of significance to the Intelligence Community, there are six main categories of sources that investigative reporters are likely to pursue: